



LETTER FROM KOLKATA (4)

Rooted in Christ, Open to All

On the road to the meeting
in Cochabamba (page 3).

PROCESSED

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Throughout the year 2007, the Letter from Taizé is continuing the reflection begun by Brother Alois in the *Letter from Kolkata*.

The first pages will treat each part of the *Letter from Kolkata* successively, starting from these three questions:

–What experiences of Church does this part of the Letter reflect?

–How was it put into practice during the meetings in Taizé or during recent stages of the pilgrimage of trust?

–What inspiration does it offer for the future?

On page 8, the portrait of a witness to faith mentioned in the *Letter from Kolkata* enables us to go further with an inner search.

Here we will recall two phrases from the fourth and final part:

Rooted in Christ, we discover a capacity to be open to all, even to those who cannot believe in him or who are indifferent.

Taizé – Tel Aviv

For several years now, Rabbi David from Israel has been coming each year to spend a few days on the hill. He has a great desire to bring Jews, Christians and Muslims closer by reading the Scriptures together. This summer he led a group of four young Israeli Jews to Taizé. One of them, Elana, wrote the following message:

"It has been a unique experience on

different levels, but most of all in being open. It is one thing to be open to people from your own religion (which I have learned a lot from you), but it is a real challenge to be so open to a different religion. The fact that you have given me this opportunity does not run by me like a high-speed French train; it has left something in my body and my heart for life. I know, or at least hope, that it will go with me in my studies, work, family and any human relations. You set an example of a pure and beautiful way of living, talking, hosting, accepting and a special way of listening and being with others. Thank you too for exposing me to a world of beautiful vocal ability and music."

More than ever, today we have possibilities to live in communion beyond national borders. God gives us his breath,

his Spirit. And we pray, "Guide our steps along the way of peace."

Taizé – Germany

In early August, one of the vice presidents of the German Bundestag (Federal parliament) took part for the second time in the meetings in Taizé, with her husband, a pastor from Thuringen, and some young people from his parish. They came with a group of young Catholics from the diocese of Erfurt and, for a few days, the auxiliary bishop of the diocese.

One day, before evening prayer, she spent an hour answering the very direct questions of many young people about the daily life of a politician, such as: the income of a member of parliament and lobbying, power and self-importance, freedom of conscience and partisan pressures, representative democracy and extremist tendencies, faith and public life. From Taizé she wrote to a German newspaper: "Almost no discussions are more global than the ones held here. We could say that this gives an example to the political world."

Verena, a German girl, continues the reflection:

"To create community between people it is not enough to sign political treaties and to open borders between countries. We need, even more, people who are ready to take the first step to be open to others, to cross the boundaries between people. We have to go towards others with eyes, ears, hands and a heart that are open.

"I have been coming to Taizé for years now. The most formative experience I have had here for my life came from the people I met. They were people who, in many different ways, always gave me the impression they wanted to be accepted and loved for who they were—just like me.

"Every day at work I meet people from all social classes and nationalities. I often experience how much prejudice they encounter—because of their background, their social relations or simply because they do not speak the language well. It sometimes makes me sad to see how often we set up walls between us instead of building bridges to one another.

"Our politicians use fancy words every day to create peace and community among nations. Where do they keep in mind, besides economic interests, the true interests of the people for whom they are responsible? Here too, agreements can be a matter of just words and a smile pasted on one's face. National borders are opened, but the borders that divide people remain standing.

"That is precisely why we are impor-

tant for our country, and for the rest of the world! Let us go back to our daily life and live out what we have experienced in Taizé in a small way, with God's help. Let us do what we can at home so that there can take root and grow acceptance and true interest in others, understanding, tolerance, and a peaceful life together."

China

The brothers of the Taizé Community live entirely by their work. They do not accept any donations. Similarly, if a brother inherits something from his family, the community makes a gift of it to the very poor. The community thus offers support to people in difficulty on different continents, among others to children who are destitute or sick.

For those who wish to do so, it is possible to contribute to this mutual aid through Operation Hope.

In 2006 and in 2007, Operation Hope supported the setting up of mini-libraries in six dioceses in Shaanxi Province, China. They are open to all. They especially serve women and children. In the countryside, nearly all the men work on the farms, while the old people, women and children remain at home. Many women have the time to consult the books they like, and are glad to have this opportunity to increase their knowledge.

Operation Hope:
see www.taize.fr,
"Other information"

Algeria

In collaboration with the Taizé Community, from August 4-13, 2007 at Tlemcen, Algeria, a new stage in the pilgrimage of trust on earth brought together approximately eighty Christians, for the most part students from sub-Saharan Africa who spend several years in that country in order to finish their studies. There were also African and European priests and religious men and women present. The initiative for this meeting came from the local Church of Oran in collaboration with the other dioceses of the country.

Guillaume, a young Frenchman, explains:

My sister and I had the opportunity to respond to the invitation of the Taizé Community to take part in that meeting, to help with the music for the three prayers that formed the rhythm of each day of that week.

It was wonderful to discover Africa in that way, with its diversity, the gradual getting to know one another, times of quiet and of shared words.

It is good to stop for a time, to pray and be in silence, to take the time to speak together and to get to know one another. Especially when you are spending several years far from home and have no other opportunity to spend a whole week living your faith openly, supported by a group.

The faith of the participants is tried-and-true. They know the trials of solitude, of belonging to a minority, of being far from one's family, problems of money, of being cut off from the religious practices of one's homeland, the experience of war.

The questions of the results of prayer and of the power of sin came up with insistence. There were many free intercessions every evening, during the singing of the Kyrie. In the course of the week, people opened up, faces were illuminated by smiles, the borders of national communities or of the city in which one studies were crossed. The Saturday evening prayer and the Sunday Mass of the nations were moments of communion and joy.

Strong statements were made to keep alive the personal searching all throughout the week. They took place during the workshops when the entire group came together, before dinner.

The witness of José-Maria, an African missionary, was a good illustration of the expression from the Letter from Taizé "a dialogue of life". José-Maria likes to talk, and he talks well. He ended with this anecdote: for his birthday, he invited his Christian and Muslim friends, taking care to alternate their seats around the table. Little by little, the discussion between his friends became so lively that he found himself with no one to talk to!

Joseph Kagima is a university professor, a Christian of sub-Saharan background, married and with children. He replied to the diverse questions of the students. The consistency between his life, his faith and his words was beautiful and reassuring.

Estella, a medical student from Burundi, told how her high-school classmates taught her how to pray, then how they chose her to be in charge of their Christian student group.

I was able to taste the joy of giving, of serving, of praying and of keeping silence all together. I give thanks for having had this experience and for having contributed to offering it to others.



MEETING IN

Cochabamba,

OCTOBER 10-14, 2007

ECHOES OF THE PREPARATION

in Latin America

A team of young volunteers is actively preparing the meeting in the city itself. Others have traveled to different countries of South and Central America, to invite the neighboring countries of Bolivia to the meeting. Here are a few echoes:

Roxana, in Cochabamba

We know well that these days of meeting will not provide a solution to the problems of my country, but rather offer a space to meet together freely. During the prayers we have in the cathedral, located in the city centre, we often hear the demonstrations of different social sectors, the firecrackers that call people out on the streets. A prayer like this, at the same time as what is happening outside the church, could seem contradictory. And yet it is not. By meeting together to pray, we come closer to one another and the indifference to what is around us disappears. We live in communion and are aware of the unease of a suffering people. During the prayers we feel closer to those who are far away, to our families.

Tony, a young Italian who traveled in Argentina:

In Argentina I encountered a great faith, an authentic faith, a faith from the heart. I encountered many faces of Christ, especially in the simplicity of life which allows clear friendships to be born, with no need of long speeches or promises.

If God led me towards a land of poverty, that is because he wanted to show me his face in the faces of the poor. And this is a sign of depth that no one can forget. Now my eyes are still full of the faces and smiles of those I met. I really hope that as groups, as parishes, they can come to Cochabamba. The journey is long and costly but they are looking for inexpensive solutions. Through the fact of meeting and praying together, the strangers that we were became friends. And for me, this is already the beginning of peace.

Merari and Rogelio, from Guatemala and Mexico:

In Guatemala, at this time we find ourselves in a situation which is not very usual.

The summary executions of women and children are almost a daily occurrence in this land so marked by violence. In addition, the recent natural catastrophes that have cost so much in human lives have stripped the population and left it exceptionally vulnerable in its extreme poverty.

In the midst of all this, speaking of reconciliation and trust, and praying together, constitutes a real challenge for the young people gathered around the icon of friendship.

In Mexico, the pilgrimage of the icon of friendship brought young people together in twenty-seven cities across the country. Each time there was a prayer service, a video about Taizé, then information about the trip to Cochabamba.

At the end of these meetings, the young people organized acts of solidarity to enable a small group of pilgrims or at least a few people to go to Bolivia to represent them.

Blanca, from Peru:

The red roofs, the wooden balconies, the slightly sloping narrow streets welcomed us to Cuzco. Our meeting coincided with the feast of Inti Raymi, the sun festival characterized by its colorful and ancestral rituals that has remained alive in the identity of the people.

We prayed a lot with those who welcomed us. The prayer in the style of Taizé is of course a structured prayer, and yet a prayer that does not claim to replace the spirituality of each person. On the contrary, this common prayer opens for us a space of freedom by adapting itself to the reality of each people.

We hope that our visit, although short, will have helped to create some links between our countries, links that already exist, to be sure, but that the conflicts of the past have undermined.

Now we have the opportunity to meet in this space of freedom, wherever our place of belonging may be.



Attentiveness to God, Respect for Human Beings

The prophet Isaiah became the spokesperson for a God who opened his heart to the people he cherished. Love and unambiguous words are not mutually exclusive. Someone who tells another what he can no longer bear has not yet given up confiding in that person.

The leaders of the nation are involved with God in a way that is repugnant to him. Their worship is useless, meaningless and even destructive. God is fed up with it (not with them); it wears him out. God no longer listens, wishes to see no more.

And yet the liturgical calendar seems to be followed regularly; the services appear to run smoothly. What matters to God is not an improvement in the liturgy but in those who celebrate it. They want to serve God and do not serve their fellows. They do not see that God has united himself to the entire nation, beginning with the weakest, the exploited and defenceless. They are thus letting the people that God has entrusted to them head towards ruin.

Their worship has turned into utter irony. They are unclean. If they wish to serve God they must change their ways. They must wash and purify themselves by doing good, helping others, bringing about justice. Those who get off track politically and socially and violate the weak and the excluded have distanced themselves from God. As the true ruler, however, God invites them to return to him and promises a pardon that will cleanse them, that will wash away the blood that cries out to heaven and drowns out all their hymn-singing.

For where God, who dwells in the midst of his people, is correctly honoured, oppression, the arbitrary use of power and injustice come to an end. Then people can sing praises to God, because they can breathe freely and their dignity is respected.

What explodes here in prolific and dramatic fashion is expressed more soberly and succinctly by Jesus when he says, "If you are bringing your gift to the altar and there realize that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and first go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

- How do I link the service of God and the service of my fellows?
- How does this happen in my local church?
- What could these words mean for people who are attempting to make their way towards a society where the rights of all are respected?

Ask and Trust

What should we do when we need something? Jesus encourages us to bring our needs to God, in a very simple action that he describes in three ways.

First, we can just ask God. Prayer is not a kind of magic; there is no need for special formulas or preparations or actions. We can simply ask in the most straightforward way.

Or we can search. Searching involves spending some time and effort, and it can mean going through frustrating times; it also leads to joy, when we search with a real hope of finding what we are looking for.

Or we can knock, as at a door. This suggests waiting in the expectation that someone will come—it implies an encounter with a person.

Christ assures us that bringing our needs to God in these ways is never in vain. We can pray, we can ask, search, and knock with entire trust, because God will hear and respond: according to Jewish practice, using the passive verbs "receive" and "will be opened" is a way of referring to God's activity without naming him.

Jesus goes on to explain further with an analogy. Even imperfect human beings know how to give their children what they need. "Though you are evil" means "with all your failings". Christ is not here denigrating human nature, but simply saying that in comparison with the limitless generosity of God, our love is a very weak thing. If even our weak love can give what is necessary for the life of our children, we have every reason to trust God as much, or far more, than human children trust their parents.

Parents want their children to seek more from them than just food; God wants us to seek more from him than just the things we feel we need now. More than the necessities of life, it is the source of life itself that he wants, very simply, to open for us. So though the passage begins by focusing on our needs, it ends with the emphasis on "your Father in heaven": what really gives life is a developing relationship of trust with him. Asking, seeking, and knocking, even when there is no immediate, obvious answer to our prayers, are ways of entering this life-giving trust and letting it grow.

- When have I experienced receiving, finding, or opening from God?
- What am I looking for?
- What helps me to keep on asking, searching and knocking with trust?

The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me? says the Lord. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. (Isaiah 1:11-18 NIV)

Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:7-11 NIV)

NOVEMBER

DAILY READINGS

25

Lk 23:33-46

SUN

18 Lk 21:5-19

SUN

11 Lk 20:27-38

SUN

4 Lk 19:1-10

SUN

5 Ba 4:36-37

SUN

1 Mt 5:1-12

SUN

2 Rm 8:31-39

SUN

3 Ep 3:14-19

SUN

4 Ep 1:1-10

SUN

5 Ex 20:1-21

SUN

6 Lk 3:10-18

SUN

7 Co 12:12-27

SUN

8 Ps 19:18b-13a

SUN

9 Rm 12:3-13

SUN

10 Ep 4:11-16

SUN

11 Ps 1:1-12

SUN

12 Ex 22:21-31

SUN

13 Ex 4:10-17

SUN

14 Ep 1:1-10

SUN

15 Co 12:12-27

SUN

16 Mk 1:16-20

SUN

17 Ps 121

SUN

18 Ps 1:1-12

SUN

19 Ps 10:14-18

SUN

20 Ep 2:1-10

SUN

21 Ho 11:1-9

SUN

22 Ep 4:11-16

SUN

23 Is 48:16-21

SUN

24 Jn 5:19-24

SUN

25 Lk 23:33-46

SUN

Jesus, our trust, we
would like to love you
with all our soul. Enable
us to dare to renew the
gift of our life, again
and always.

1 Thu ALL SAINTS

Jesus said: How blessed are the
poor in spirit: the kingdom of
heaven is theirs. Blessed are the
gentle, for they will inherit the
earth.

2 Rm 8:31-39

3 Ep 3:14-19

4 Ep 1:1-10

5 Ba 4:36-37

6 Lk 3:10-18

7 Co 12:12-27

8 Ps 19:18b-13a

9 Rm 12:3-13

10 Ep 4:11-16

11 Ps 1:1-12

12 Ex 22:21-31

13 Ex 4:10-17

14 Ep 1:1-10

15 Co 12:12-27

16 Mk 1:16-20

17 Ps 121

18 Ps 1:1-12

19 Ps 10:14-18

20 Ep 2:1-10

21 Ho 11:1-9

22 Ep 4:11-16

23 Is 48:16-21

24 Jn 5:19-24

25 Lk 23:33-46

SUN

DECEMBER

DAILY READINGS

9 ^{Mt 3:11} SUN

ADVENT Jesus said to his disciples: Stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

^{Ep 5:8-14}

3 Mon You are light in the Lord. Live as children of light; for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth.

^{Ez 37:24-27}

4 Tue The Lord says: I shall make a covenant of peace with my people, and it will be an eternal covenant. I shall set my sanctuary among them for ever.

^{Pr 4:18-27}

5 Wed The path of the upright is like the light of dawn, whose brightness increases to the full light of day.

^{2 Th 2:16-3:5}

6 Thu May our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father who has given us his love and, through his grace, such ceaseless encouragement and sure hope, encourage and strengthen you in every good word and deed.

^{7 Col 1:15-20}

7 Fri Christ is the image of the unseen God; in him all things have been created, in heaven and upon the earth, both the visible and the invisible.

^{8 Ep 1:3-10}

8 Sat Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every kind of spiritual blessing.

16 ^{Mt 11:2-11} SUN

John the Baptist came as the prophet Isaiah had said: A voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight."

^{Ac 17:22-28}

10 Mon Paul said: In God we live and move and have our being.

^{1 Co 7:29-31}

11 Tue Paul writes: From now on those who buy something should live as if they had no possessions and those who use the things of the world should do so without being engrossed in them. Because this world as we know it is passing away.

^{Mk 13:33-37}

12 Wed Jesus said: What I am saying to you I say to all: Stay awake!

^{13 1 Co 12:31-13:13}

13 Thu Paul writes: Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known.

^{Mt 13:1-23}

14 Fri In a parable, Jesus said: The seed which was sown in good soil is like someone who hears the Word and understands it; that person bears fruit.

^{6 Gn 12:1-5}

15 Sat The Lord said to Abraham, "Leave your country, your kinsfolk and your father's house for the land I will show you." And Abraham set out, as the Lord had told him.

30 ^{Col 3:12-17} SUN

Paul writes: May the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one Body.

^{Heb 1:1-14}

31 Mon In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets in many different ways. But in our time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son.

23 ^{Mt 1:18-24} SUN

An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

^{Mt 11:28-30}

24 Mon Jesus said: Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

^{Jn 1:1-18}

25 Tue CHRISTMAS The Word was in the world and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. But to all who accepted him he gave the power to become children of God.

^{Mt 10:17-22}

26 Wed St STEPHEN Jesus said: When you are handed over, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. What you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, for it is not you who will be speaking but the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.

^{Mt 10:17-22}

27 Thu St JOHN This is what we have heard from Christ: God is light, in him there is no darkness at all.

^{Jn 6:16-21}

28 Fri The disciples saw Jesus coming towards their boat, walking on the lake, and he said, "It is I. Do not be afraid."

^{1 Jn 5:42}

29 Sat John writes: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

The following texts are taken from the "Short Writings from Taizé", a series of booklets that the community began to publish this summer for the purpose of offering an approach to the fundamental wellsprings of the faith. They examine questions that are vital for Christians today.

How does the New Testament speak about faith?

In the New Testament, faith takes first of all the form of a movement. It is a concrete step a person takes, that of "coming to Jesus." Perhaps we could even say that before being a "movement towards" it is more fundamentally a thirst, a desire: "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me and drink, whoever believes in me" (John 7:37). If Saint John parallels "coming to" and "believing in" (cf. 6:35), he knows at the same time that this "coming to Jesus" depends in the final analysis upon a secret attraction that the Father has already exercised on a person's heart (6:44).

Faith is thus concerned in the first place not with specific truths or with promises for the future, nor even with insights into the existence of a transcendent God. It begins by "going towards" the person of Jesus, and this "going" is often motivated by a thirst. Something is already secretly at work in the heart. It is already attracted to. With the incarnation, with the presence of Jesus as a human being, faith at first takes an extremely simple form: a desire can contain in itself the beginning of faith; a movement already represents the beginning of the road.

When Jesus is no longer in the midst of his disciples physically, the movement towards him is no longer expressed by changing one's place—going towards him and then following him—as was the case before the resurrection. Whoever believes in him still takes a concrete step, but this step involves abandoning oneself to him, handing oneself over and leaving room for him. The paradox of faith thus becomes more evident: it is practically nothing and it is what matters more than anything else. It is a matter of opening the door of our heart to him constantly, while at the same time knowing that he is already inside. Is there anything poorer or more disinterested than that—opening the door to someone who is already there? Christ does not dwell within me like a stranger who wants to take my place. He is there as the one who loves me, who has put himself in my place, who in his love is, in the depths of my being, more myself than I am. And yet it is up to me to open the door to him constantly, for between him and me everything remains personal; nothing happens without me, automatically. Everything is of the nature of a living relationship.

Saint Paul, for his part, employs a curious expression: "the faith of Christ" (e.g. Philippians 3:9). It thus does not only mean faith *in* Christ, either in the sense of recognizing who Christ is or in surrendering ourselves to him. There is more: faith comes from him as a gift; it is the faith *of* Christ and I receive it as that by which he unites me to himself and enables me to live like him. Here again, my part in faith seems almost nothing. And yet everything is given to me together with faith. This "almost nothing" determines my whole way of being.

Brother François

What enables us to say that Jesus died "for us"?

What seemed to be self-evident in the Jewish tradition and in the New Testament creates a difficulty in these days of strong individualism. Contrary to the feeling of "each for himself", every human being was considered as representative of humanity, humanity envisaged as a unity, not abstractly but as a reality of a spiritual order. This is difficult for us to imagine today.

We do, however, have experiences of close human solidarity, of profound communion, in which we feel that all humanity is one and that every human being can offer a figure of this humanity. Think of how it affects us interiorly to learn that someone offers to die in the place of another. Think of so many men and women who do not hesitate to risk their lives for the sake of someone else, or even more simply who give their lives in service, as if that life belonged to others. Or think of examples when one person suffered and this suffering affected us as if it were our own. In such situations, one suspects that humanity is not restricted to just a random juxtaposition of individuals, but that it tends towards a unity of which each human person is a representative. It was in this sense that Brother Roger liked to talk about the "human family".

In this perspective, Jesus himself, in a unique and absolute manner, is to be confessed as the Man *par excellence*, as Pilate expressed better than he knew when he said: "Behold the Man" (John 19:5). Such an expression must inevitably be understood on two levels: "Here is your man, the individual you have brought to me", and "Here is the image of Man such as the Creator planned him from all Eternity, the true representative of every human being in the eyes of God."

Indeed, in the manner in which God chooses to enter into relationship with humanity in the closest way possible, one cannot understand the reason for the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ unless we recognize in him the Son of God becoming the brother of each of us. Our brother and, even more, our representative before God—even better; the way I am almost personally present to God. We can say that Christ takes our place to live before God a human existence which responds perfectly to the love of his Father and that he faces in place of us the curse of death. But paradoxically, he takes our place without taking it from us but rather, by giving us our true place.

By his human birth, it is my life that he takes into himself in order to give me a share in his—in his earthly existence, lived in freedom and obedience; in his sorrowful and victorious Cross; in his eternal life. So great in him is the gift of his life, in the face of the curse of his death, that he turns it back into a blessing for himself and for us.

Brother Pierre-Yves

A PORTRAIT

Dorotheus of Gaza (Sixth Century) Humility and Communion

The *Letter from Calcutta* quotes this text from Dorotheus of Gaza on page 4:

"Imagine that the world is a circle, that God is the center, and that the radii are the different ways human beings live. When those who wish to come closer to God walk towards the center of the circle, they come closer to one another at the same time as to God. The closer they come to God, the closer they come to one another. And the closer they come to one another, the closer they come to God."

(Instructions VI.)

Son of a wealthy family, very cultivated, so enamored of reading that he brought his library to the monastery, as a young man Dorotheus entered the community of Abba Serid near Gaza in Palestine. He became the spiritual son of Barsanuphius and John, two contemplatives known for the depth of their correspondence. These "great old men," as they are called in the monastic tradition, moderated his absolute desire for contemplation and for this purpose suggested that he build a hospital for ill or elderly monks. The experience led him gradually to leave behind his properties, his books, his rich garments. He became the head nurse of the hospital built and paid for by his family.

His correspondence with Barsanuphius is famous for the "contract" which the two concluded: Barsanuphius would take Dorotheus' sins upon himself (he suffered from an emotional life he had trouble controlling) on the condition that Dorotheus keep from pride, malicious gossip and needless words. In a moment of doubt, when he was thinking of leaving the monastery, he received these words of

Barsanuphius which enlightened him: "Like the anchor of a ship, so will the prayer of those who are here with you be for you." From these difficulties a strong attraction for the common life would be born, and the assurance that the prayer of others can support a vocation for one's entire lifetime.

He would remember how sensitively these two "old men" accompanied him when, after their death, he founded his own community a few miles from his first monastery. For those who joined him there, he wrote down the "Instructions" that have come down to us. Characterized by a realistic outlook that does not ask for the impossible, he proposed a life made up of peaceful self-renunciation, with no excesses and resolutely communal. For him, the community forms a true body where each member exercises a particular function. A monk's solitude does not imply isolation. He wrote: "We should do what is said of Abba Anthony: he gathered and kept the good he saw in each of those he went to visit—from one, gentleness, from another, humility, from still another, the love of solitude. In this way he had all the qualities of each person in himself. That is what we should do, too, and visit one another for this purpose." (Letter 1, 181.)

Dorotheus inserted into the wisdom of the desert a significant contribution of pagan wisdom. He insisted in particular on the role of personal conscience, a divine spark in every person, and defined virtue in the fashion of Aristotle as "the middle-ground between excess and lack".

Dorotheus emphasized "keeping the commandments", the only thing able to bring the grace received in baptism to the roots of evil in us, and on "openness of heart" to the man or woman who accompanies us. He especially condemned monastic pride, ascetical competition among monks, and placed humility at the summit of the spiritual life. The advice he gave his monks to resist temptations without rigidity, but instead with calm and gentleness, still remains fully relevant today. At a time when many feel paralyzed by the fear of failure or doubt, these encouraging words of Dorotheus need to be heard again: "At the time of trial, remain patient, pray and do not try to conquer the thoughts that come from the tempter by human reasoning. Abba Peomen knew this, and stated that the advice 'do not worry about tomorrow' (Matthew 6:34) was meant for someone being tempted. Convinced that this is true, abandon your own thoughts, however good they may be, and keep a firm hope in God 'who can do infinitely more than what we ask or think' (Ephesians 3:20)." (Letter 8, 193.)

The Letter from Taizé will undergo extensive changes in form and content so as better to complement the website. Beginning in January 2008, it will be published four times a year. A new format, new paper, and a new layout will emphasize this updating.

In its first two pages, the Letter will continue the reflection begun by Brother Alois at the beginning of the year. The last two pages will offer reflections, inspired by the Bible, on questions of faith today. The short daily bible readings will be found in the double page in the middle.

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